



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1440
TTY: (207) 287-4469

Elizabeth M. Caruso

P.O. Box 81
Caratunk, ME 04925
Residence: (207) 399-9992
Elizabeth.Caruso@legislature.maine.gov

Testimony in Opposition to LD 2174

“An Act to Increase Predictability in Permitting of Renewable Energy Development”
February 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and honored members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Elizabeth Caruso; and I represent House District 72, which includes nine towns and 20 townships and plantations in northern Somerset County.

I live in the beautiful, rural town of Caratunk, where I have served as the First Selectman for 20 years. Since 2023, I have also worked for Somerset Economic Development Corporation, which encompasses meeting with all Somerset towns on a variety of economic topics. For the last 33 years, I have worked in the outdoor tourism and hospitality industry and even co-founded The Forks Area Chamber of Commerce.

During my years in local government, Caratunk has enacted many ordinances including the Caratunk Energy Systems Ordinance that covers solar, wind, and transmission projects. I was also the principal author of our 2020 Comprehensive Plan. As you may or may not know, all municipal ordinances, which are selectboard approved, and land use ordinances, which are resident-enacted, **must** support the Comprehensive Plan as approved and enacted by the local legislative body.

In general, this bill seeks to extend the state's preemption for hydropower projects to all energy projects. Because hydropower projects can cross municipal boundaries and have wide-ranging implications under both state law and the national Clean Water Act, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection has had longstanding authority to regulate this space.

But make no mistake: The author of this bill wants to preempt local jurisdiction for all energy projects to create a fast track for project genesis and completion, including all wind and solar projects. It makes no mention of the requirement to abide by the comprehensive plan of any municipality. By design, this bill would not just weaken home rule but actually **makes statewide radical changes to how Maine towns operate, self-regulate and whether Maine people have a say** in where they have chosen to call home and/or establish businesses and livelihoods.

Specifically, the bill does the following:

- It prohibits municipalities (city, town, plantation) from enacting or enforcing an ordinance, standard, condition or requirement applicable to a solar energy, wind energy, or energy storage system development, or high-impact electric transmission lines within the municipality that is more stringent than state statute or rule.
- It states that local regulation is void and has no force or effect if it violates this restriction.
- If a commissioner fails to issue a decision on an application within a certain timeframe, the application is deemed approved – regardless of qualifying merit or criteria.
- It favors some but not all by creating “special processing time limits.”

In essence, this legislation is unconstitutional. It picks winners and losers.

It prioritizes and favors for-profit corporations and developers over citizens who have exercised their constitutional rights to vote, thereby usurping and negating their voice, their rights and their votes.

Although I’m sure it was not the sponsor’s intent, this language disenfranchises our constituents by using the Legislature to sidestep true representation of the Maine people. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard Mainers complain about Augusta mandates and the dictatorship of state government by passing laws that disregard the democratic will of citizens on laws they actually raised their hands for – laws that were determined at the grassroots level.

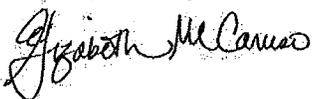
Many of us hold the view that Maine’s vast land and privately-owned landscape can be of statewide value and interest. It’s apparent that one’s perspective of land value and interest can vary depending on where you’re from – rural or urban, the County, coastal, western or Down East Maine. I fundamentally disagree with the premise of this bill: that municipalities lack the perspective, passion, vision, and expertise to best guide decisions that effectively plan for their future.

Local decisions are best made by local people, not those who live and work hours away. Maine is not monolithic, and ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL. What’s good for Portland or other urban areas is not the same as Kingfield, Searsport, Caratunk, Machias or the County.

Regardless of whether I look at these changes through the lens of a municipal official or a legislator, it is terrifying and insulting. But as an elected local and state representative, there is no stopping the coming loss of rights if this bill passes.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to vote “ought not to pass” on LD 1274.

Respectfully,



Elizabeth M. Caruso
State Representative

Vision

Caratunk offers a peaceful and safe, small town community where year-round and seasonal residents enjoy an unmatched quality of life. We value Caratunk's natural assets which attract our landowners and visitors: wildlife and fisheries habitats, forest resources, natural features, and the extraordinary quality of our numerous water resources. To sustain and protect our natural scenic beauty and recreational opportunities, we will manage future development in a responsible, sustainable way and ensure that current or future land use policies support this vision.

Prepared by:

Caratunk Comprehensive Planning Committee

**Elizabeth Caruso Gary Lemay
Christopher Young Rebecca Young**

Certified by:

State of Maine

Bureau of Resource Information & Land Use Planning

Adopted on July 22, 2020

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